



Levee revives North, South debate

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GREENWICH TWP. -- Local officials say new information should give them more leverage in soliciting funds from the federal and state governments to fix the dilapidated Repaupo Flood Protection System.

The system is composed of a tidegate here and a 412-mile levee extending into Logan Township that spans the property of several private entities, such as the DuPont and Hercules companies along with various residents.

The system -- which protects an estimated 10,000 county residents from flooding -- has fallen into disrepair over the last several decades. Neither the county nor municipal governments have been willing to undertake the estimated \$30 million in needed repairs to adequately overhaul the system.

In the past, state and federal governments have also denied responsibility for repair of the levee.

Today, though state officials promise some \$2.25 million to replace the tidegate, they are asking the township to chip in \$750,000, county officers say.

State Sen. and Freeholder Director Stephen Sweeney said the Gloucester County Improvement Authority would "front" this sum while his administration attempts to get the state to pay it in full.

According to Township Solicitor Ken DiMuzio Sr., the federal government contributed more than \$237 million to the Greenbrook Flood Control Project, which covers a 65-square-mile watershed in parts of Union, Somerset and Middlesex counties.

"The description I have of the project says it covered 66,540 feet of levee and 11,220 feet of flood walls," said DiMuzio. "It also has many other flood-related improvements like bridge replacements."

DiMuzio said that the various municipalities affected by the Greenbrook flood-control system formed the Greenbrook Flood Control Commission, which DiMuzio believes had much to do with their procuring federal and state aid.

"I'm seeking information from them about their charter, to see the mechanisms they used to form the commission," said DiMuzio. "I'm exploring starting our own commission."

Another revelation that may assist the townships in getting the help they need is the discovery that the Repaupo Meadow Company -- an entity chartered under King George in the 1700s to maintain the flood control system here -- is technically not defunct, as it was thought to be until recently.

"There are more than one of these meadow companies throughout the state, and most -- like ours -- predate the formation of the state," said DiMuzio. "They were given the authority under the king's and then under the state's charter to build levees and tidegates and periodically drain and flood the land. They're not defunct, they're just not funded."

DiMuzio said the companies were made up of those who owned the land upon which the flood-control systems sat, and that they funded their activities through raising and selling salt hay.

"That's how they operated 300 years ago, and that's how they're supposed to operate in 2005, abut you can see the problem with that," said DiMuzio. "The economic system has changed over the decades, so the economic engine that furnished the funds to maintain the levees and the tidegates has become antiquated."

Now we have these abandoned tidegates and levee structures, and there has been no government institution created to replace the meadow companies. That's how we inherited these problems."

DiMuzio is investigating ways to form an entity to either succeed or complement the meadow company.

"Where the money would come from is a good question," said DiMuzio. "But logic would tell you that if the state created a company and charged it with the responsibility of creating, operating and maintaining levees and tidegates, and if those companies, because of socio-economic circumstances, no longer have the means to fund their operations, then the state should step in to assume the burden."

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